



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FINAL 5 DEFENDANTS CONVICTED IN SCHEME TO SELL COUNTERFEIT CIGARETTES

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced that in San Antonio, the five remaining defendants each face up to five years in federal prison after pleading guilty this afternoon to their roles in a large-scale counterfeit cigarette distribution operation based in San Antonio.

Appearing before United States District Judge Royal Furgeson, Wael Wahid Jamal Abdelaziz (aka "Tony"); Ziad Mahmoud Alsalameh (aka "Zee" and "Ziad Mahmoud Al Batainch"); Haleem Hamoudeh Hamoudeh (aka "Mike"); Mohammad Diab Al-Rafati; and, Suleiman Bhojani all pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to possess, receive, distribute and sell in excess of 60,000 cigarettes with counterfeit Texas tax stamps. To date, 20 defendants have been convicted in this case. Authorities are still searching for Aziz Abdallah Abdelaziz and Awni Mahmoud Derieh (aka "Asfar Munther").

In the scheme, the defendants, some of whom are convenience store owners, knowingly conspired to obtain stolen cigarettes which contained counterfeit Texas tax stamps and profit by reselling them directly to the public. During this investigation, authorities seized over \$800,000 cash generated as a result of this criminal enterprise.

This investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the San Antonio Police Department.

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